

Walk Right Up and Get a Job

Birmingham, Alabama, EC

Which is easier: walking up to a bank teller's window or following the usual job-search process? The answer was obvious to the Birmingham EC, which has set up a walk-in job center in an old bank building with intact teller windows at an easily accessible location to serve EC residents. The EC Job Bank is located on a corner in a heavily traveled section of the neighborhood, surrounded by businesses, private homes, apartments, and churches. Bus service runs to this area throughout the day. The Job Bank also has sidewalk access for pedestrians as well as free parking. The attractive building donated by AmSouth Bank is perfectly situated to help EC residents find good jobs. But the Job Bank's building and location are just the beginning.

“Invest your time and energy for returns that can last a lifetime.’ These words could serve as a slogan for the Job Bank,” states Lisa Isay, the program's Director. “The Job Bank's mission is to advance the long-term employability and economic self-sufficiency of EC residents by linking job-seekers with local employers.” With partners that include the State job agency and \$331,000 in EC funds for 3 years, the program serves 200 to 250 people who walk up to the service windows each month. In the Job Bank's first year, a single Alabama Employment Service representative completed job placements for 264 EC residents. Job Bank staff contact potential employers and ensure that the people they refer to employers have a contact person who is expecting them. Once a person gets a job, the program follows up with support that includes childcare subsidies and intensive social services.

This year the Job Bank is adding several new services. Staff are designing a database to track the long-term progress of customers. A new Job Bank calendar, which is distributed throughout the community, lists the days and times its public and private partners—such as the State Employment Service, Job Corps, Easter Seals, the Independent Living Center, and Youthbuild—will be at the Job Bank. Partners do everything from making group presentations about an industry to recruiting for the Job Corps. Another new service is Fax-a-Job. Potential employers and related agencies will be given Fax-a-Job sheets on which to provide information they have about each job opening. The sheets can then easily be faxed to the Job Bank.

For more information contact Randall Wormley, Program Administrator, at 205-785-8941.

Art Club Reaches Out To Help Kids Rekindle Their Artistic Energies

Birmingham, Alabama, EC

Wisdom holds that every child is an artist, but these creative impulses usually are buried by external pressures to conform. The Birmingham Art Club, with support from the EC, is working to bring the arts to local children and rekindle their artistic appreciation and abilities. The club knows that even if the kids do not become artists, they will be enriched, better citizens.

“If we can get students to learn to appreciate the arts even though they may not become artists, they will be better people,” says Cleophus Vann, who helps direct the effort. The Art Club, which has been pursuing this and other community efforts since the 1960s, has a 3-year, \$90,000 grant from the EC to expose more kids to art. The grant has enabled the club to broaden its activities. Starting from its base in the A.M. Brown Community Center, the club has added activities in three more community centers and four schools. Since 1996 nearly 1,300 children have learned a wide variety of visual and performing arts and crafts in 3-, 4-, and 6-week courses. Each course ends with performances that have reached more than 4,000 people in the community. Thanks to the program, the Art Club also has a writer-in-residence in a high school and an arts and crafts specialist-in-residence in an elementary school.

The program’s partners and supporters include the State humanities association, local arts organizations, corporations, and individual donors. Corporations have underwritten entire sessions of the 3-week courses. Given this ongoing level of support, Vann is confident that the established Art Club will further increase its outreach to children even after the EC grant ends.

For more information contact Cleophus Vann, Assistant Director of Programs, Birmingham Art Club, at 205-929-1457.

Former Bank Building Transformed Into Job Bank

Birmingham, Alabama, EC

The Birmingham EC advisory board has transformed a former AmSouth Bank building into a full-service, community-based employment center. The Enterprise Community Job Bank, incorporated in October 1997, works to advance the long-term economic self-sufficiency of unemployed and underemployed residents. Through the Job Bank, work-ready applicants receive a direct line to local employers. It is conveniently located for EC residents, and employers find it an efficient facility from which to recruit and orient employees.

Partners in the effort include the Alabama Departments of Industrial Relations and Human Resource Services, the Housing Authority of the Birmingham District (HABD), Childcare Resources, the United Way, and the Birmingham Independent Living Center. These partnerships provide access to State job listings, childcare referrals, case management, job readiness training, and job coaches for disabled residents. Fourteen families identified through HABD are receiving intensive intervention and support at the Job Bank as they work toward self-sufficiency. The United Way coordinates transportation through a Work Routes Program for residents whose job sites are beyond regular bus routes. An employment interviewer with the Department of Industrial Relations-Employment Service is stationed at the Job Bank to assist clients with computer access to statewide job listings. A counselor with the Birmingham Independent Living Center staffs the Job Bank 2 days a week and provides employment services to individuals with disabilities.

Monthly job readiness classes teach basic job-search skills and techniques and, at the request of employers, stress the attitudes, behaviors, and skills that lead to job retention. Approximately 30 new applicants visit the Job Bank each week, and, on average, 40 people find employment each month.

For more information, contact Denise Blue Poe, Program Manager, Birmingham Enterprise Community Job Bank, Inc., at 205-785-8941.

First Financial Institution Opens

Birmingham, Alabama, EC

The University Credit Union, an NCAA financial institution, opened a branch on Eighth Avenue, North, in the heart of the Smithfield business district. The credit union was courted by the Enterprise Community Board. The credit union is the first financial institution to establish an office in this historically African-American community. Since the branch opened, Branch Manager Herman Williams has become active in community affairs, particularly the Economic Development Committee of the EC Advisory Board.

For more information, contact Herman Williams, University Federal Credit Union, at 205-930-5072.

Community Policing and Public Safety: Block Watches Organized on Every EC Block

Birmingham, Alabama, EC

The Enterprise Community's Block Watch Community program officially began in July 1996. Patterned after nationally celebrated Block Watch programs, it aims to organize a Block Watch element in every block within the EC. EC blocks are organized under the direction of police department teams consisting of a sworn officer and a crime-prevention officer. The project is managed by the Urban Development Group, Inc. The Block Watch goal is to reduce crime in the targeted areas, prepare citizens, and improve ties to local police. The effort establishes a strong, ongoing dialog between the police department and the residents of the Enterprise Community. Committed to the idea of community policing, the EC advisory board has purchased cellular telephones and 911 service for Block Watch captains. Bicycles are being purchased for Block Watch patrol officers and crime-prevention officers.

For more information, contact Willie Huff, Director of the Urban Development Group, Inc., at 205-320-3010, or John Gemmill, Director of Community Enterprises Division, at 205-254-2870.

Public Safety: Block Watch Pays Off in Public Safety Birmingham, Alabama, EC

“You’ve got to be the eyes and ears of the police department,” says Bernard Mays, who coordinates public safety programs for Birmingham’s EC. The community is putting “eyes on the street” through 171 new neighborhood block watches. Birmingham is on its way to creating 300 block watches in a concerted effort to enforce zero tolerance of neighborhood crime.

As part of the block watch program, residents work closely with police and become actively involved in neighborhood crime prevention. Community police attend weekly block club meetings and get to know residents. The EC has also purchased 30 cellular phones for emergency communications on patrol.

“It’s working real well,” says Jon Berry, President of the Rising-West Princeton Neighborhood Council. Residents had been afraid to sit on their front porches before block watch came to their neighborhood. Thanks to participation by approximately 85 percent of the neighborhood’s households, residents can go out and about with confidence. Says Berry, “We who live in this neighborhood know everything that is going on in this neighborhood.”

Police agree that the striking reductions in EC crime rates are attributable in part to this resident involvement. Between 1996 and 1997 in the EC, the incidence of robbery fell 22 percent and burglaries fell 17 percent. Incidents involving narcotics dropped by 15 percent, while both vandalism and disturbance calls went down 14 percent.

For more information, contact Bernard Mays, General Manager, The Urban Development Group, at 205–320–0310.